

REVIVING THE ART OF STORYTELLING

— INDIRA ANANTHAKRISHNAN

It being the Year of the Family, there is an awareness in the air of knitting together the family that is being torn asunder by the increasing momentum of modernisation. However, it is not a million-dollar project to bring together kith and kin. It just needs that little human touch which has been neglected and even nullified in recent times. It also needs a little time to sit and think what has brought about this sorry state of affairs and how it can be rectified without moving heaven and earth. As I sat and thought, I was reminded of the good old art of storytelling that thrived in families and communities not very many years ago.

For thousands of years, storytelling has been a shared experience in the family or the community. Even though the world view today may be vastly different from earlier times, there is no denying of the fact that storytelling can be and should be revived as a valuable means of communication. It is this lack of communication today that brings about problems in families or in larger groups.

The values of sharing stories with young people are many. Listening to the narration of an event is an emotional experience for children, which is, at the same time, memorable and enjoyable. It binds them to the elders who tell them stories.

Storytelling has existed from time immemorial in Persia and India. It perpetuated the strength of tradition and culture in these countries. The time honoured folk-tales, myths and legends spread by word of mouth. These stories told to the audience stirred their imagination and also taught them lessons of life that can never be as well taught or remembered in school lessons. With the development of printing technology and the

audio visual media, the story-teller disappeared, and the disintegration of the community began. However, storytelling existed as an integral part of the joint family. But today, even the joint family has broken down, and the bonds of togetherness have become very weak, alienating us from one another.

At this juncture, storytelling could be revived in a small way in every family to integrate the family. Those aspects of communication that are lying dormant in today's life-style would surface.

Grandparents play an important part in this revival of the art of storytelling. Young parents of today, however, may find it difficult to do so, for various reasons. The overwhelming task of finding time to tell a story or even to read out a story to their wards is in itself a monstrous challenge for the modern parent. But, one always finds time for what one thinks is important. If telling a story or reading aloud tops the list of priorities, then half an hour a day would not be difficult to come by for this pleasant task. "I'll tell you a story..."— magic words indeed!

"But what if my children won't listen?" asks the confused parent. Just a small spark of interest has to be kindled. It is bound to burst into a flaming desire to be together and share a common experience. Starting out just for fun and laughing together can make a good beginning. They say, a family who laughs together can face life's challenges better together.

I must mention here the invaluable work done by the Children's Book Council of Iran. A project called 'Reading with the Family' has been specially designed by the Council to make parents aware of the importance of family togetherness, and that one way of doing it is by reading to-

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gether. Two workshops were conducted to kindle parent awareness, and now, ten bags, each containing one hundred books for children, are being given to ten enthusiastic families to read together and enjoy. The bags will circulate among the ten families every month so that at the end of ten months at least ten families would have the spark of togetherness rekindled in themselves. They in turn could tell others. The project would then have a snowballing effect.

The feeling of being together and sharing a common experience of telling and listening to a story multiplies happiness, and friendship is fostered. Emotions are shared and the feeling of reassurance and security is enhanced. Those who in their childhood and youth have enjoyed this experience of listening will remember those occasions as strong symbols of family solidarity. Let these symbols continue to be strong in this Year of the Family and in the years to come.

All writers are well-wishers of children.

-Emjay

Stretching helps growing—shrinking is dying.

-Emjay

Lack of opportunity at the right time can kill even the most talented.

-Emjay